

NewTek SpeedEDIT

A Look at the Latest Version of the Video Editor

By Brian Peterson

A

year ago NewTek introduced what they billed as the fastest video editor on the market. They called it SpeedEDIT. Since then NewTek has released two major upgrades, 1.2 and 1.5 and one minor fix, 1.5.1, all of them are free for existing owners. The retail price of 1.5 for non-owners is \$495.

Before we get into details of the latest version, I'd like to cover something that I briefly touched on in a previous article – photo montage creation. These days with everyone from the videographer to the banquet hall manager offering to do photo montages, it's important to be creative and FAST! The one sure way I have found in keeping my montage production costs low (providing higher profits) is in using SpeedEDIT!

SpeedEDIT excels in photo montage creation. I sat for a few minutes watching his editor assemble their montage, seeing how they manipulate their images and then I grabbed the same images he had spent the last hour working on and began to recreate the exact same motion in SpeedEDIT. As mentioned in my previous article, SpeedEDIT allows for complete manipulation of video or images on the X,Y and Z axis through the use of splines to shrink, spin, flip, move or whatever you want to do within a 2-D space. Once you create a manipulation using splines, you can save those settings in what SpeedEdit calls the Toolshed. (Other programs refer to this



MAIN EDITOR

If you buy SpeedEDIT for one thing, creating montages, it will pay for itself within just a few jobs. Recently, I had the opportunity to compare photo montage creation in Adobe Premiere vs. SpeedEDIT. A friend who has been for years producing montages on Premiere called me up for a demo of SpeedEDIT. When I arrived at his studio, his assistant was working on a 200 picture montage.

The first major benefit of using SpeedEDIT is in picture cropping. As anyone who uses Premiere knows that after scanning, you must crop your pictures to a screen ratio of 720x480 to use them on the Premiere timeline in an SD environment without rendering. So you scan the picture, crop the picture to it's actual size, then open up a new file of 720 x 480, drag the photo onto the new file, position it and resize it, and then save it for importing into Premiere..

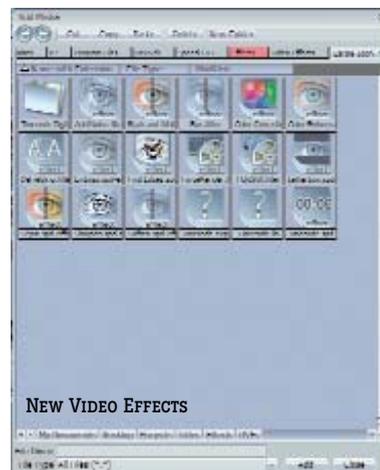
However, with SpeedEDIT, the steps are to scan the image to your desired resolution, crop the picture to its own size, and then save. When you drag the photo into SpeedEDIT, it takes the aspect ratio and resizes the image so that the entire image is showing. Note: In a screen ratio of 16x9, a horizontal picture will nearly fill the screen whereas on a 4x3 screen all of the picture will show but black bars will be at the top and bottom.

My friend was blown away when I grabbed some other pictures they had not properly cropped for use in Premiere and dropped them on the SpeedEDIT timeline. I began to rapidly assemble a quick and dirty montage with nothing but crossfades between pictures and no movement - thus showing how he could completely eliminate a huge step in his Photoshop work.

Automatically sizing of images to properly fill the screen isn't the only place

as a template) Then you can use that manipulation on other images or video clips with one click of the button.

One thing to remember though is that when you manipulate a vertical image, the settings will be applied to the next vertical image just fine. But, if you try it on a horizontal image, it will distort the image in a way you didn't intend. So you





STORYBOARD AND TIMELINE

have to create two presets – one for a vertical image and one for a horizontal image. Within just four minutes, I recreated their four basic image movements and saved their settings in ToolShed for both horizontal and vertical images.

In only 10 minutes, I had imported all 200 pictures, and selected and applied one of four basic moves to each of them. From there adding motion backgrounds and transitions to all of them took another five minutes. To finish it up, I altered movements on a few of the pictures to better fit the subject of the image. In 20 minutes, I had not only recreated what had already taken the editor an hour to create, but had finished the complete 200-picture montage and was rendering it out to DVD while his editor would have probably needed another hour to finish the project.

For this reason, in my opinion, SpeedEDIT is the best piece of software out there for high-quality, low-cost, profit maximizing photo montage creation. My basic photo montages now take only about 12 minutes to create once the images are scanned.

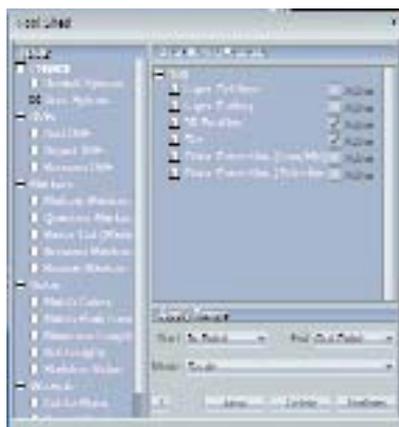
Version 1.5.1 Faster... Must Go Faster!

So what does NewTek have to offer this time around? For me, SpeedEDIT has just become a little faster. Last time I mentioned that in my opinion the M2V rendering engine in SpeedEDIT leaves something to be desired. While it's been slightly optimized since the initial review it still is far from a place where I want to use it.

In order to get around this problem in the previous two iterations of SpeedEDIT you had to render an AVI (usually type 2 DV with PCM audio) and import the resulting AVI into a third party render

program. Most NewTek users prefer TMPGenc. Depending on the speed of your computer, just rendering the AVI could be slower than real time and then the computer has to render the mpeg file in your 3rd party software.

Well NewTek listened. Included in this latest version of SpeedEDIT is an AVI wrapper! The AVI wrapper allows you to import the timeline project directly into TMPGenc or many other programs with no pre-rendering required. The elimination of the middle step has really sped up my DVD creation. This was a desperately needed feature and NewTek delivered. After several renders I've had no problems and am very happy with the results.



THE TOOLSHED

Optimization of the software is also a noticeable improvement, especially on my older dual Xeon computer. Some things that turned the timeline sluggish and triggered background rendering, like dropping 2-hour long clips on the timeline, are far improved over the previous versions. However, I still recommend the fastest computer you can afford for this software, especially since quad cores have dropped so dramatically in price.

Render Quality

A problem that was discovered after the original review was written was the quality of HD rendering from the timeline. Close inspection of a rendered clip showed high levels of artifacting. Also problems cropped up in down-rendering an HD clip to SD. That has been resolved in the latest iteration. The rendered file is far better-looking when closely analyzed.

VST Support and Audio

NewTek has also improved VST support in the new version, allowing finer control of settings, and how they're applied. I ran a few brief tests on some basic VST plug-ins and found control has improved. However, VST support isn't quite making up for something I've been discovering about audio control on the timeline since the last review.

To have full control over your left and right channels of audio on the clip, in SpeedEDIT you actually have to clone the audio track and set one left/right track to play only one of the tracks back and the cloned track the opposite. This will allow you to finely manipulate the audio properties of either channel of audio. To me this is a clunky audio implementation, we should be able to manipulate the channels right on the clip. This wouldn't be so bad -and here is where it becomes very frustrating - if you could lock the cloned audio clip to the video it belongs to! Clip-locking has been one of the most demanded features in SpeedEDIT. Since you can't lock an audio track to a clip when you do this trick, it's very easy to knock the cloned clip out of alignment with its video clip and cause a nightmare of additional work. Of course, if you are

not relying on multiple audio sources on either the left or the right channel, then this doesn't present a problem. The problem can be overcome by dumping the clips into a sub folder to protect them while you work on other areas of the project, but it's a bit clunky.

Other Improvements

QuickTime support has improved, with the newer variations now working on the timeline except for H264 which my test refused to recognize as a video clip.

New Web render presets have been added - a minor change in my opinion. I was satisfied with the combination of stock presets plus my own creations, but others might find them useful.

Additional Effects. A few new effects have been added to the tool pallet, but frankly nothing I'm too excited about. These include: an improved sepia tone, b/w conversion, and noise to simulate grain. Effects are one area where the software is severely lacking. Many of these DVEs have existed since the original sister system, VT. and a few of the old ones that were cool, like charging sheep (I did find a use for it in a few montages) have long vanished for some reason. I don't use much beyond cuts and crossfades, but one of these days I'd like to see cool modern effects and told NewTek so at the August EXPO.

Automatic Backup. SpeedEDIT now offers the ability to back up files to another computer overnight, and you don't have to worry about drive letters or names - it will adjust them to fit the new computer. This is a pretty cool feature, which I haven't

experimented with yet. I don't have a computer to do this with and I still use tapes. But as we go tapeless with the new generation of cameras this will become a very important feature to make sure we don't lose important data.

As of press time SpeedEDIT does not have native support of the Sony XDCAM HD/EX cameras and hasn't announced that it's coming. A recent post on the NewTek forums did state someone had managed to play back EX footage on the timeline using the Sony Wrapper, but this hadn't been confirmed as of press time.

In summary, I'm impressed by the new iteration of SpeedEDIT. Many of the concerns that cropped up in the early versions have been addressed and speed and stability have noticeably improved. I'm also surprised this was offered as a free upgrade instead of a new 2.0 version which many companies would have done.

While there are a few clunky areas (mainly that we can't lock clips and you have to clone the audio track for precise control of the L/R channel) this does not detract from the overall value of the SpeedEDIT experience. Nothing I've ever used compares to its ability to create photo montages so quickly, efficiently and cheaply or do your basic bread and butter type editing of cutting, and moving clips around a timeline. That alone is enough to recommend getting this software - even if you use it just for montages.

Brian Peterson, a videographer since 1994, runs River City Productions and Bridalfilms.net in South Bend, Indiana.